

VZCZCXYZ0001
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHJM #3005 1981142
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 171142Z JUL 06
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3481
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 003005

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGERFO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/12/2016
TAGS: KPAL KWBG PREL ASEC IS
SUBJECT: PLO ENVOYS RETURN EMPTY-HANDED FROM DAMASCUS

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Two PLO envoys traveled to Damascus on July 9 in order to deal with the crisis that began with the kidnapping of IDF Corporal Gilad Shalit on June 25. The envoys met with Syrian Vice President Farouq al-Sharaa', Syrian Ba'ath officials, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Deputy Hamas Political Chief, but not with Khaled Mishal. They failed to secure agreement with HAMAS regarding release of the soldier. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

¶2. (C) According to PA Presidential Advisor Abu Hisham, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) sent two envoys to Damascus July 9 in an effort to mediate with Syrian officials and the Hamas-based political leadership to win the release of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. The two envoys were Taysir Khaled, member of the PLO Executive Committee and most senior Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) representative of the Hawatmeh group in the West Bank and Gaza, and Abdullah Hourani, a former Ba'ath party official with close ties to the Syrian regime. During their visit, the envoys reportedly promoted an Egyptian proposal calling for the "immediate release" of the captured Israeli soldier in exchange for a "promise" to release Palestinians at a later date.

ENVOYS MEET WITH SYRIAN VICE PRESIDENT,
HAMAS AND OTHER OFFICIALS, BUT NOT MISHAL

¶3. (SBU) According to media reports, Deputy HAMAS Political Bureau Chief Mousa Abu Marzouk met with the two envoys the evening of July 11. According to the media, he discussed with them ways to end the crisis in Gaza, but stressed that HAMAS' position is to release the soldier only in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Abu Marzouk told the media the two envoys did not meet with Khaled Mishal (Note: Mishal reportedly refused to meet with them. End note).

¶4. (C) After their meeting with Abu Marzouk, the two envoys met with Nayef Hawatmeh, leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), Syrian Ba'ath party officials and Ahmad Jibril, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine- General Command (PFLP GC).

¶5. (C) The envoys met with Syrian Vice President Farouq al-Sharaa' the evening of July 12. Contacts told ConGen Political Specialist that the meeting failed to reach an understanding on ways to end the crisis of the kidnapped

Israeli soldier. Al-Sharaa reportedly told the two envoys that Syria will not mediate or pressure Hamas on the matter.

¶16. (C) The envoys departed Damascus the evening of July 14. On July 16, President Abbas told reporters that the two envoys failed to reach any agreement with HAMAS leaders on the issue of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers and ways to resolve the standoff.

FATAH OFFICIALS DOWNPLAY EXPECTATIONS
OF DAMASCUS MEETINGS

¶17. (C) From the start, Fatah officials downplayed the chances of success for this mission. PA Presidential Advisor Ahmad Abdelrahman told ConGen Political Specialist on July 11 that the envoys left for Damascus without a specific proposal, that the envoys have no influence on Hamas' leadership, and that their ties to the Syrian regime are not strong enough to change the Syrian regime's strategic support for Hamas.

¶18. (C) Fatah leader Hussein al-Sheikh told ConGen POL FSN Specialist on July 11 that even PA President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) had very little hope that the envoys would succeed. According to al-Sheikh, before his July 11 departure to Jordan, Abu Mazen told him he sent the two envoys in response to pressure from Abdullah Hourani -- one of the two envoys.

WALLES